

Astrid van Nimwegen

In the video work *Garage Doors*, 2013 the scene begins with a hardly identifiable dark, almost black surface. A short moment later the inner side of an electric garage door becomes recognizable, while that one opens up and reveals the scene behind – a pictorial Dutch landscape. The position inside the darken room and the look outside into the daylight, generates the feeling of a subjective camera, where the audience takes its point of view. Then everything focuses on the scene outside, framed by the garage door itself. The high quality of the filmed material enables to discover every detail, to observe every leaf shaking in the wind and the changing of the light under the moving clouds and the thereby molded shadows on the road. In addition to the visual aspects comes the sound of the wind that complements the whole experience of the viewer. Then after two minutes of presentation, the garage door closes again and therefore evokes the idea of a theatre curtain falling down after the show. The chattering of the door ends with a final heavy clash when it hits the ground, followed by silence.

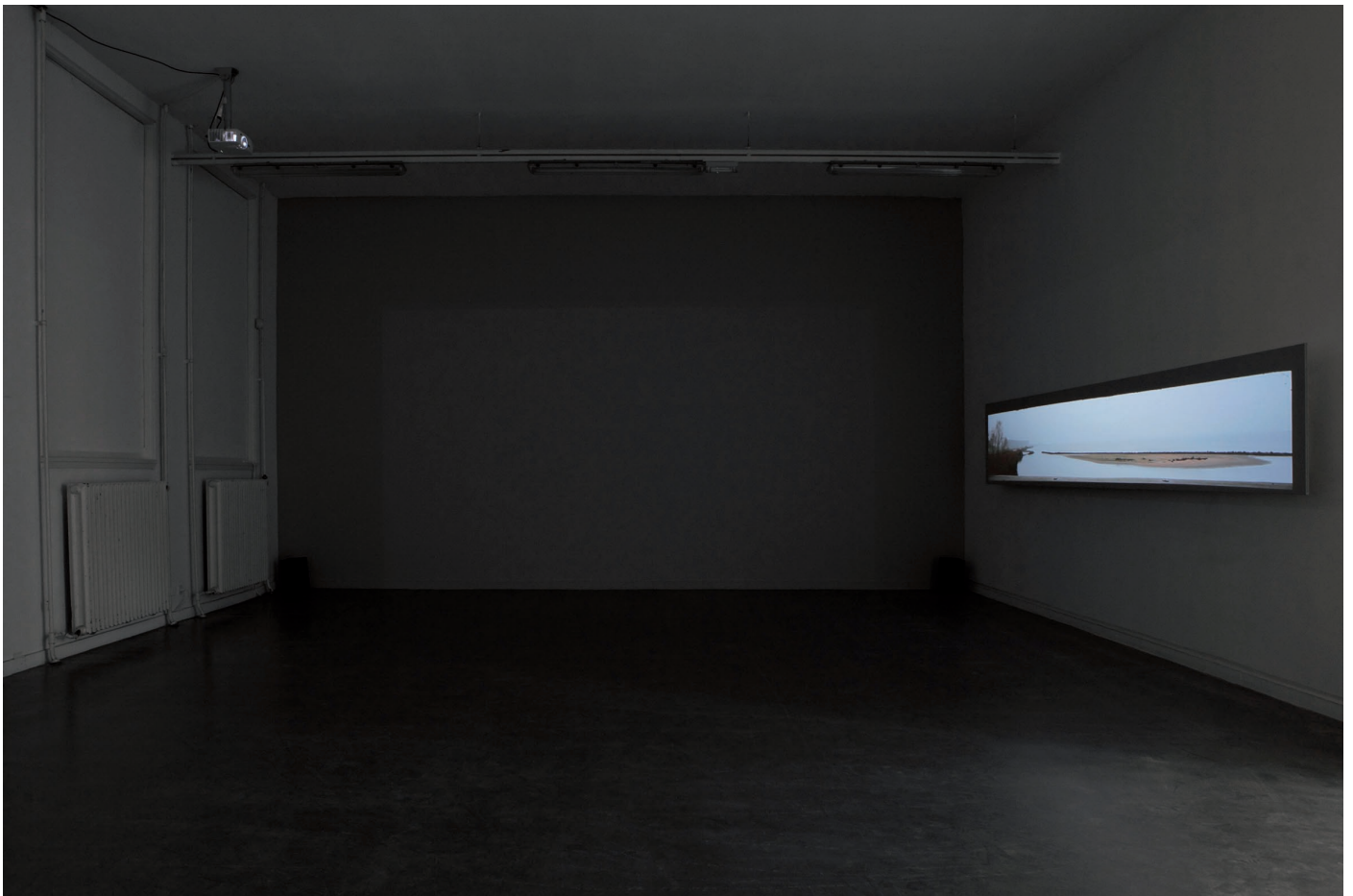
A short time later, the gate opens again and daylight illuminates the floor until the same landscape appears once more. However this time in another atmosphere, the weather has changed, the trees look different and wet asphalt reflects the sky. Besides these distinctions, the fixed angle of the camera remains the same and the alleged stillness raises an expectation of an event. Then the curtain falls again. The procedure repeats and creates a suspense what might be unveiled next time behind the door.

The very reduced, almost minimal work of filming the scenery, gives the work all its force. Astrid van Nimwegen follows her self-imposed formal rules which she applies also on her other video work with the title *Birdspotting Hides*, 2013. As in the previous work *Garage Doors*, the nature where everything takes place is essential and underlines the strong connection to a specific environment that the artist aspires in her artistic research. This time different sceneries are framed by the extreme wide format of bird hide windows. At different times a day an area crossed by water is slightly filmed from above with a centered horizon. While the focus lies on the panorama, suddenly a flock of birds passes by and interrupts the concentration of the stillness in the scene. The sound of the birds creates a strong auditory perception, this surrounding enables the viewer to feel a stronger connection to the filmed environment. He seems to be more integrated into the outdoor nature and less hidden in an interior space, compared with his look out of the garage door.

In both series the significant pictorial landscape refers to Dutch paintings. Furthermore the vastness of the nature, the role of the horizon in *Birdspotting Hides* and the thematic of the look out of a window into the far distance evoke the idea of longing in the sense of the romanticism. The beauty of the scene captures the viewer and invites him to contemplate. However, what can be found in both works is the illusion of being part of the scene and meantime only a distant observer, they oscillate between exterior view and internal perspective, between real world and imagination.

Astrid van Nimwegen presents *Garage Doors* and *Birdspotting Hides* in a dialogue. While *Garage Doors* is projected in original size on the one side in the exhibition space, the opposite wall remains dark. Only if the garage door closes its shutter, the projection of the bird spotting houses starts on one wide screen. The combination of the two works convinces with its strong coherence in form and content and the thereby amplified individual experience of the passing of time.

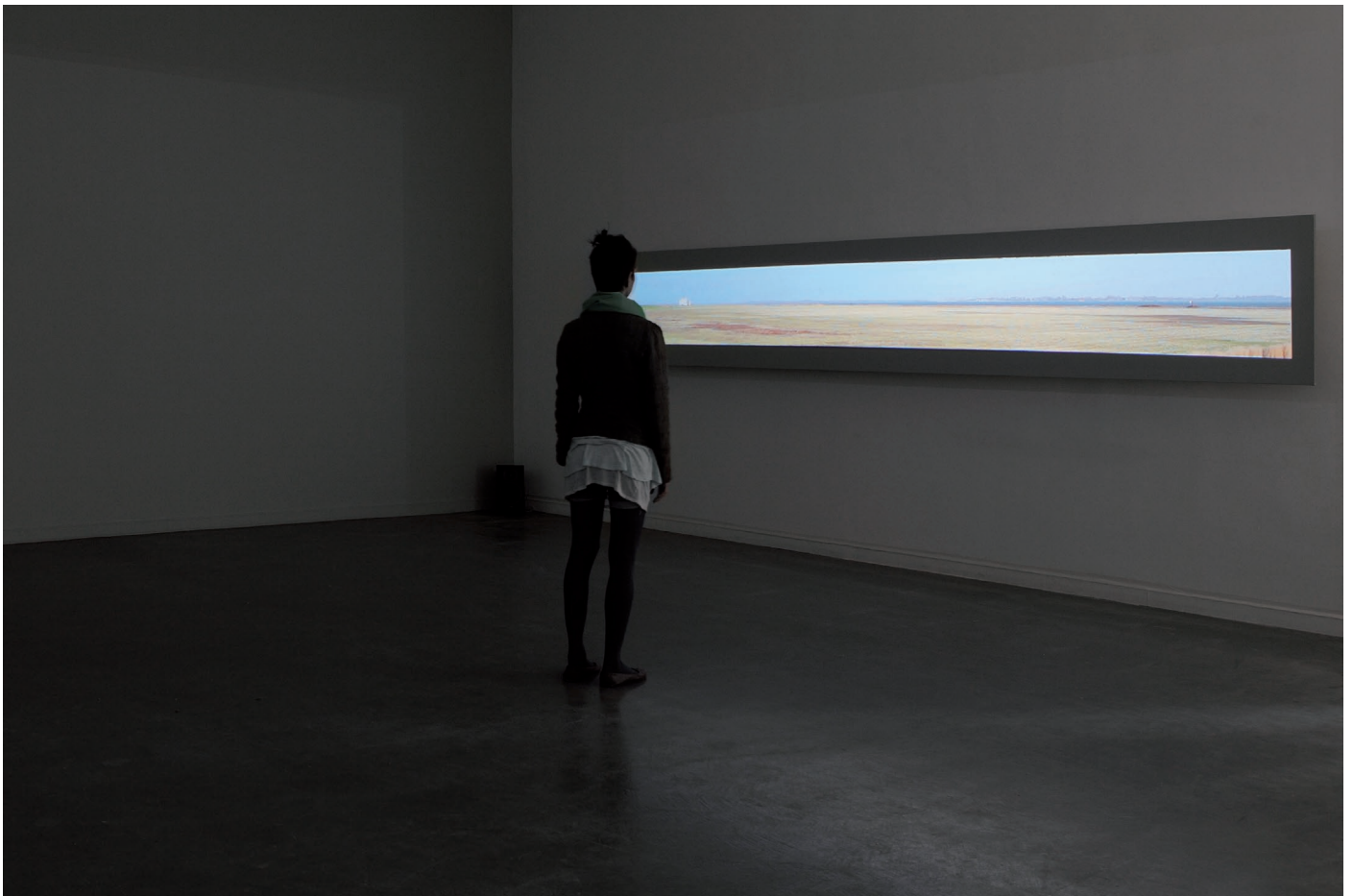
Exhibition view, Graduation Show Piet Zwart Institute Master Media Design and Communication
Tent, Rotterdam 28.06.2013 – 25.08.2013



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Why do you work with video and what role does its media specificity play in your work?

Video allows me to depict literally the passage of time within a space, that's what I like about the medium. It can capture our 'reality' as it is, although reality off course, in essence, remains ungraspable. Digital video has no concrete 'body' any longer like it used to have in the analogue film. So in that way digital video as a medium becomes ungraspable and transparent as well, you cannot hold it in your hands. The moment I am looking for I already find within the world and within our being in this world. It seems quite logic to me to depict these moments by pointing the camera at it, and thus let reality be what it is in its own right. I can say I set up a frame or a space with my strict parameters where reality can evolve in by the passing of its own time. This space has to be very specific, not too narrow or hermetic but just big enough to let existence take place. Video allows me to do that.

Have you ever worked with analogue film material?

I have been working with analogue film; I still do now and then. I think film and video are two complete different mediums and are difficult, if not impossible to compare with each other. I once made 'Heartburn' with 16mm film. I burned holes with a cigarette in the filmstrip in a particular rhythm that formed a heartbeat when projected in a loop. Also the soundtrack was burned in on the same rhythm. Working with analogue sound and image is just something else than within digital sound and video. However I do like the work of Bas Jan Ader and Tacita Dean and the more structuralist works by Michael Snow and Stan Brackage. So I can imagine that I would continue working with film in a later stage.

In what context would you place your artistic work?

I am a fine artist working within the medium video. The work invokes resonance into the field of structuralism, minimalism, classical landscape painting, early cinema, photography. I think the best way to define the work is that they are 'time-based' video work.

What differs you from a filmmaker working in a team?

I would like to have a job on the set, and work in a group on someone's project, maybe as a camera assistant or focus puller, mainly to learn technical things in practice. But this work would never be the same as my own working method as an artist. When making my video work I really need my solitude to be able to focus and select the 'right' moments.

How important is the experience while recording in nature?

I live in the middle of nature so it surrounds me all day. I want to depict things in nature which I see in my surrounding every day but which other people often seem to take for granted. When I look at my footage after the shooting I can conclude if I captured the right moment or not. Although it is interesting to sit in those different bird hides and discover new things in nature my self. Of course my basic way of living in a nature environment highly influences my work. I especially like those particular days when the landscape changes very fast by how the light falls upon it. Mostly the best contrast and lighting is at the end of the day or when the sun comes through just before a heavy thunderstorm, the beauty you then see is really unbelievable. It makes me reflect upon my own being and position in and towards the world.

While looking at your work the notion of sublime appears. Can you recognize that interplay between attraction and the feeling of being overwhelmed in front of the vastness of nature?

Yes, I recognize that. That is the duality within life and being. And it's also significant for me as a person, life attracts me but I am often overwhelmed by it as well and capable of suffering of life as well as enjoying it, I even experience those two extremes at the same time. My video work refers to the inevitable event of becoming and fading, our existence is transient, just like nature. I hope the work recalls that in the viewer.

The flat nature almost seems to erase the human presence, even though the signs of agriculture are very visible. What does that focus on the absence of the human body add to your work?

I used to perform in my former video work and I did work with other characters as well but it is very difficult to depict reality when working with people, they change when pointing a camera upon them; they start to act, I don't like that. And if I find a person not acting, it seems always be too much created by me or it becomes a documentary. In the end the human body comes into the work when it is installed in an exhibition. So in that manner the presence of the human body completes the work. The work then starts to question the position of the observer towards the landscape-projections.

After what criteria do you choose your location and where does intuition take place?

That is different with each project I guess. With the Garagedoor series I collected over 60 recordings now. None of those recordings is the same because the appearance of the landscape and the light keep changing every minute, every day, every month. With the bird hides I go to multiple locations to see how the windows and their viewings are. Sometimes I am disappointed by the first visit but it can be that this is only because the light is not that strong on that particular moment. I once visit a hide close to Belgium more inside country; there I didn't like the nature that much. I couldn't identify myself with that place. There are many places in the world where the landscape is more beautiful then here but on the other hand it is not really about the beauty, it is even too easy to select on beauty. I am more looking for daily life environments where you don't expect anything to happen. The first intuitive choice is the moment I select the place to set up my tripod. Even though it now becomes more and more a conscious choice. That has to do with becoming experienced by knowing where and how to recognize the right set up. The second intuitive choice is when I see the footage on the screen, maybe 1 out of 20 shots is strong enough to be selected. I first have to see everything and observe it again on the screen.

To what extend do you need to have the control over the image?

I am really precise and everything is deliberate. The selection of garage doors for my graduation project are now lens corrected and a little bit sharpened, there came a point I needed to be careful in not going to far with the postproduction. They are stronger now the lens distortion is gone but I don't want to manipulate the image too much because there is a danger in losing the depiction of that particular moment. I want to avoid that and remain true to my parameters and reality. That is why I didn't do color correction. The colors are like I saw them at that moment. If white clouds I saw during a shoot turns out to be yellow in the footage, it can become problematic but then I would rather shoot again and change the settings of my camera closest to how my eyes perceive the landscape. By using the strict parameters I control the image till a certain degree but at the same time I am creating a space where 'change' can take place. 'Change' cannot be directed of course but I set up the conditions for it.

Garage Doors as well as Birdspotting Hides are filmed in a format where the surrounded black on the screen is strongly present. How important is the role of the frame in your work and how do you consider the off camera?

The camera already puts a frame around the shot of course. But in Garagedoors and Birdspotting Hides I use the frame to emphasize the inner and outer world. It becomes like somebody once said a 'monologue interior'. The frame is part of those formal parameters I use to literally frame the passing of time taking place.

Please tell us more about the value of sound in your video installations.

The sound you hear with the videos is the sound of that same moment. In one of the bird hide windows, the landscape possess great muteness; there is almost no movement, but at that moment it was storming, you hear that in the soundtrack and that results in an alien contradiction. It may suggest that the sound is put on later but because all the sound in the other shots is sync as well, I don't think people misunderstand it. In the installation I use two times stereo sound to create a square space to put the viewer in.

How do you argue with someone's critic that reduces your work to pure formalism?

My work is trying to find balance between form and content. It is difficult to argue about content if it is ungraspable. It is a lot easier to talk about form. I think I use a rigid structure to underline the ephemeral content, a starting point for reflection upon our being.

Tell me more about your working process, how would you define your methodology?

I work mostly on my own within a natural environment and I work in series, so I go back multiple times to the same place to record the same scene. The tripod is then placed on the exact same spot; I mark this on the floor and on the tripod. Afterwards I observe the footage with the sound on my screen, when it is good enough I load it in my editing program and sync the sound with the video and lenscorrect it in another program. Lately I started to work on the sound as well, for example I filter out disturbing wind noise.

What value does the process of research have in your work?

My work is an ongoing research, I like that there is no concrete end-goal. It gives a lot of freedom. And the work consists of series very often. So I need to continue shooting the same scenes over and over again. I think the Garagedoor series will be finished if a year has passed. Then I can make different kind of selections of them and build installations out of these and the research may be finished.

You studied in a department for media design and communication. How far that thinking has influenced you and how have you been able to focus on your self-directed research?

The reason I applied to the master media design - lens based media is because I searched for a master in which I could develop my technical skills and develop my methodology. When I came to the course I was still shooting on DV-tapes and didn't know a lot about cameras and editing. In the course we didn't had classes in these things but there is technical knowledge available to guide you in things you want to make. I like to learn things by doing them and found the support in the course to fix problems I run into. Next to that I learned to develop my language in articulating my practice in the methodology writing classes and there were enough people who helped me with content of the work. I think this is the way a master program works; you teach yourself and use the guidance that is offered. In the first year the two departments lens based and networked media merged together but I just continued my own research in which I could take in some little parts of the networked side that I found interesting and for the rest focused on my own projects. I perfectly know what I wanted from the course and I think these things were available.

Can you reveal anything about your future projects?

I have a couple of ideas for installations with the footage I have. I also made shots of the outside of the Bird hides which have the exact same parameters as the garage doors, it would work really nice to project these opposed each other. The transparency of the viewing through the door is opposed by the vastness of these almost sculptural bird hides. Both videos will consist of a series in which you see the light in the shots changing by time. Another thing I am working on are recordings taken under bridges where sound plays a big role, but this is still on an early stage. And the bird hide work is an ongoing project, I want to visit hides through Europe and maybe make an installation of these accompanied by a little book with stories of my journey and stills of the videos.